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The Church as Landlord

This hold of the lamas on the people does not result from the organized activities of the church. There are few schools for children run by the monasteries. The monasteries have instruction in philosophy, astronomy, literature, and religion. But that instruction is for the lamas, not the laymen. Children are not taken under the wing and indoctrinated. The monasteries do not exert a power over the people through hospitals, medical care, homes for the aged, and the like. They render no community service, except as they send lamas to a home to pray by the bedside of a sick person, to conduct a funeral service, or to perform a marriage ceremony.

They hold their people by fears and superstitions and poverty. Their paraphernalia are numerous. The *mani* walls, the *chhortens*, and the *obos* are perpetual reminders to every sojourner in this region of his religious duties, of the spirits that haunt the trails, of the dangers which transgressions bring. There is the Tibetan proverb that "without a lama in front there is no approach to God." The lama is the person who has command over the spirit world, who can drive away the evil forces, who can interest the good deities in the welfare of the people. The lama has contacts with the other world. He has the wisdom and the power of the land. He can conjure up even Yama, the King of Hell, and all his demons. He can produce Yama in the flesh for all to see.

The whole weight of tradition is behind Lamaism and its power. The native Ladakhi, like the Tibetan, is illiterate. He can neither read nor write. He has no radio to listen to the news of the world. There are in all of Ladakh not over three radios.

The native, filled with fears and superstitions, gets his learning in part from paintings. The word "painter" means literally the "writer of gods." Ladakhi and Tibetan painting is the equivalent of a language where one can see in anthropomorphic form the virtues such as Mercy and Chastity and the vices such as Lust, Anger, and Greed. The colors, postures, and gestures of the figures all express ideas. The peasant, who lives in a world dimly

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lighted and full of scheming devils, learns about the paintings from the lamas. He first learns of devils and demons from the lips of his parents when he is a babe, from the stories his elders tell as he grows up, from the legends of pass poison, evil demons, revengeful gods that men in the caravans relate. And when he goes to the monasteries, the stories he has heard at home are confirmed. The lamas put on their dances and out come Lust, Anger, and Greed in person. Even the most stupid person can see them in all their ugliness. Thus are the natives indoctrinated with fears and superstitions. The devils are always present; they are a factor never forgotten in the daily life of the Ladakhis. A Ladakhi burns incense to sanctify his house. He spins his prayer wheel and observes the ritual of the *mani* walls and *chhortens*. And to gain religious merit, he goes on a pilgrimage, sometimes to India proper, in search of the river of mystery in the fashion of the lama immortalized by Kipling's *Kim*.

Rahul, devout Buddhist and a prominent layman in the church, made a speech a year or so ago saying the monasteries should become educational centers, bringing in the children from the surrounding areas and teaching them. The wrath of the lamas descended on Rahul. He was severely taken to task.

"Why?" I ventured to ask.

"Because the power of the lamas is in part due to the ignorance of the people," Rahul answered. "That is the reason why Tibet has been the forbidden land. The lamas do not want ideas from the outside world to reach their people. Ideas, you know, can be disturbing."

That is why travel of foreigners throughout the whole area was long restricted. That is why lamas, fearful of the importation of ideas, would sometimes turn bandits loose on travelers. That is why, even today, the educational activities of monasteries—apart from their perpetuation of superstition—are practically nil.

Lamaism has a vested interest not only in the ignorance of the people but in their poverty as well. Poverty and ignorance, in